

(Washington, D.C.) Congressman Tim Ryan today sent the following letter to the U.S. Department of Labor asking for an immediate investigation in the cancellation of health benefits by Amweld Building Products. Text of the letter follows:

March 13, 2009

The Honorable Hilda Solis, Secretary

United States Department of Labor

200 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Solis,

I write today requesting an immediate investigation into the Amweld Building Products LLC pension fund. Retirees of the closed Amweld plants in Niles and Garrettsville, Ohio, are being told their health coverage was cancelled retroactively while their premiums continued to be deducted from their pension checks. It is my understanding that the previous plan administrator has been fired, yet we have learned that the new owners continue to withhold the health insurance monthly premiums. To our understanding, the old, new, and parent company all deny responsibility for the plan.

Because of multiple bankruptcies and creditor sales, the company has passed through the hands of Amweld Building Products LLC, ARK II Manufacturing LLC, and Amweld International LLC. All three companies are apparently controlled by Patriarch Partners LLC. Despite repeated attempts by retirees, employees, and their union to contact all of the firms involved, it is not clear which of the companies could or should be currently liable for the plan's administration.

The cancellation is especially frustrating and troubling both because of its retroactivity and the negative impact that it could have on continued care. In addition to the enormous burdens that lack of health coverage can cause, the beneficiaries also face multiple deadlines for obtaining new coverage prior to the expiration of existing healthcare benefits. This is in addition to the simple outrage that, despite a retroactive cancellation dating to January 1, 2009, deductions were taken out of the March 2009 retiree pension checks. This makes a timely determination of responsibility for the plan crucial.

Ascertaining the status of this pension fund and its continued viability is of critical concern for me and for my constituents. Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter. I or a member of my staff can be reached at (330) 373-0074. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Tim Ryan

Member of Congress

Cc: Virginia Smith – EBSA Office of Enforcement, Director